

Zizi, the Little Detective

CHAPTER I.

HARDLY had the Paris world, or more particularly the world in the neighborhood of Montrouge, ceased talking of the frightful murder that had been committed in that quarter on July 28, when another, more frightful if possible, took place in the Quartier Montmartre.

In the first instance an old man had been murdered in his bed, his valet left for dead in an adjoining room, and the apartment searched so thoroughly that a considerable sum of money which the old man had, as he thought, successfully hidden, was found, and the murderer decamped without leaving the slightest clue whereby to trace him.

The search for this villain had not ceased when, on the night of August 13, Mme. Viardot, a widow and a wealthy householder, was killed in her dressing-room. She had evidently been sleeping on a couch in that room on account of the extreme heat of the weather, and the sum of fifty thousand francs, which she had that day withdrawn from the bank for the purpose of making a payment upon some property she had recently bought, was abstracted from the secretary in her bedroom. There were indications that the poor woman had struggled with the assassin; but not a sound had been heard by her maid, whose room was [nearby], nor was it possible to surmise how the murderer had entered or left the house.

Mme. Viardot had attended to some rather tiresome business during the day, and had retired early, while her maid after performing her usual duties had followed her mistress's example.

She had slept so soundly as not to have heard the slightest sound, and in the morning, after waiting to hear Madame's bell, had knocked at her door to remind her that she had intended to go to early mass, as it was the anniversary of her husband's death. She had received no reply, and, after knocking once or twice more, had softly opened the door, even then a little alarmed, for Madame was an unusually light sleeper. Her screams as she saw her mistress dead before her soon reached the cook and housemaid, who flew to her side, and in a few moments more a *commissaire de police* and a stern looking *sergent de ville* were in the room examining, questioning, and searching, but in vain, for some clue to the murderer.

"It is the same man, Gustave," said the commissaire in a low tone to his subordinate.

"I am sure of it, monsieur," replied the sergeant.

It was evident, said the surgeon, that death had been caused by a blow which Madame had received on the back of her head, from some heavy, blunt instrument. "And that is precisely what they said about M. Morgat, who was killed last month," said the coachman to the weeping cook.

It was quite true, but that was all they found; and in spite of all their vigilance, two weeks passed, and they were no wiser than before.

About six o'clock on the morning of the 6th of September, a young man, only partly dressed, and in a state of great excitement, was seen in a window in the Rue Poissonnière. He was gesticulating violently, and heard to scream in shrill tones, "Aux secours, aux secours! Je suis volé, je suis volé!"

To the sergent de ville, who had come quickly to his aid, he explained that the day before his uncle had confided to him for safe keeping a considerable sum of money, which he had not cared to carry to his country home, and which he was to use on the morrow. The uncle, when he arrived from St. Cloud, corroborated the young man's story. Again the police examined and questioned; again all was in vain; but in reply to the youth's lamentations that he had slept so soundly as to have been unable to defend the property intrusted to him, they gravely reminded him of M. Morgat and Mme. Viardot, who probably had been awakened by the same criminal, only to be sent by him to their long, dreamless rest.

They did not doubt that the same mind had planned and the same hand had executed the murders of July 28 and August 13, and the robbery of September 6.

By this time public excitement had risen to a great height, and the daily papers criticised the police in a manner most distressing to the feelings of that vainglorious but generally most efficient body of men. They were angry, mortified, frightened. This was no common criminal with whom they had to deal.

Ten days more passed, and on the evening of September 17 the papers were full of an affair that had taken place in the Boulevard de Sébastopol the night before. M. de Joly, who lived *en garçon* on the third floor of a large and very respectable house in the Boulevard, had made a very pretty fortune at the Bourse. He was unmarried, and his only relative was a brother, to whom he was sincerely attached, who had gone many years before to the United States, settled in New Orleans, where he had married, had a large family, and lived most comfortably. He continually wrote the most affectionate letters to M. de Joly, begging him to come and pass the remainder of his life with him.

This the elder brother had at last decided to do. He had sold his furniture, let his apartment to a friend who was to take possession of it on September 17, on the evening of which day it was the intention of M. de Joly to sail from Havre to New York, as he had an old friend in the latter city whom he was anxious to meet before establishing himself in New Orleans.

He had a considerable sum of money in the house, though less than might have been expected, for late in the day, acting upon the advice of a friend, he had bought letters of credit for large amounts upon New Orleans bankers.

It was the custom of the old woman who waited upon him to knock at his door punctually at eight o'clock every morning; but she had been directed to call him, on this his last day in Paris, at six. Hoping that monsieur's generosity would equal her diligence and punctuality, she was there at the moment, knocked, and awaited a reply.

Again she knocked, and waited again; nothing but silence. Muttering to herself that monsieur must indeed have been very tired since he slept so soundly, she knocked a third time, and called, a little impatiently, "Monsieur, monsieur! It is past the time you desired me to call you"—and listened. The silence was at length broken by a faint sound like a heavy sigh, and followed after a short interval by an unmistakable groan. Another interval, and groan succeeded groan.

"Monsieur," cried the old woman, thoroughly frightened, "are you ill? If you can unlock the door, I will come to your assistance." A deeper groan was the only reply. She waited for a moment, then ran swiftly down stairs to the lodge of the concierge and told him what had occurred. Arming himself with an immense bunch of keys, he quickly followed the woman as she ran up stairs, and in a moment more the door was opened. The same instant showed them that M. de Joly was not lying ill in his bed as they had expected to find him, but was stretched motionless and unconscious on the floor of the ante-chamber, his face and head covered with blood.

"Fly! fly for help!" cried the old woman in an agony of fear. "He is dead"—and almost before she had done speaking the concierge was in the street, and in an incredibly short time had returned with a physician and a sergent de ville, who after a slight examination sent to the nearest police station for his superior, the commissaire. In the mean time, M. de Joly—thanks to the skilful treatment of his physician—had recovered consciousness, though some time elapsed before he was able to speak. At last slowly, and with great effort, he related the following facts:

He had retired early on the previous evening, being much fatigued, and intending to rise at an unusually early hour on the following morning. How long he had slept he did not know, when he was roused by a very slight sound in the adjoining room. Half asleep, and thinking that it was a great Angora cat, of whom he was very fond, scratching to be admitted to his bedroom, he rose without a moment's hesitation, and opened the door between the two rooms. No sooner had he done so than he received a heavy blow upon his shoulder which caused him to fall to the floor in great agony, and another on his head which must have deprived him of consciousness.

Two or three times during the night he had recovered himself, only to sink again into insensibility; and he had made a great though unsuccessful effort to reply to the old woman, and to open the door for her. He had been robbed of his money and papers. Again and again did M. de Joly reply to the questions asked him, that he could say no more; that he only saw, as he opened his bedroom door, the figure of a little man in the light that came through the window from the street. But in reply to the questions put to him, the concierge declared positively that no one left the house to his knowledge after eleven o'clock that night.

"Would it be possible for anyone to leave without your knowledge, monsieur?"

"No, monsieur."

Upon hearing this statement, the policeman who had been on duty in that immediate neighborhood between the hours of twelve and two, declared that he had been walking slowly up the street, watching two women, evidently a young lady and her maid, who passed him rapidly, and who seemed to be frightened at being out so late. He heard the young lady say, "Hurry,

‘Toinette. I do not like being out at this hour. It was nearly one when we left—’ But he lost the rest in the distance. He had followed them as far as he could, thinking that his presence would reassure them. His beat ended at the corner of the Rue des Acacias, and the house in which M. de Joly lived was two doors from the corner, on the opposite side. As the women were crossing the street he looked at his watch and saw that it was fifteen minutes past one. As he again looked at the two women they were passing No. 95 (the house in which the robbery was committed), and he saw the door open, a short, thickset man come leisurely out, close the door behind him, and walk slowly away in an opposite direction. It did not excite his curiosity or surprise in the slightest degree, for it was no unusual thing for people to be out in Paris at unseasonable hours.

The inmates of the house were questioned, and it appeared that none of them had been out late on the preceding evening, or had had company, with the exception of the family on the fourth floor, whose grandfather had called early in the evening and gone away at half-past nine precisely, and the family in the *entresol*, who had received a visit from the *fiancé* of mademoiselle their eldest daughter—but he had gone away at a very few minutes after ten, as all the family could testify, as well as the concierge, to whom the happy lover had generously and extravagantly given the munificent sum of ten francs. Not only that, but he proved to the entire satisfaction of every one that he had gone directly from No. 95 to the Café d’Algerie, where he had played *béziq*ue with some of his brother officers until a quarter of two.

The young lady was found who had passed with her maid, and who had noticed the man who came out of No. 95 as they passed the door.

He was short. She did not see his face distinctly, but thought she should recognize him again by his general appearance. He was not stout, but looked like a very strong man.

And this was all. M. de Joly recovered his health, but not his money; the police were in a state of frantic disappointment and baffled fury; the Parisians were in a pitiable condition of terror and indignation. How was it possible for this miscreant to enter and leave the houses unnoticed? How was it possible for him to know so exactly who had and who had not money, and to *spot* his victims with such unerring precision?

CHAPTER II.

ON the morning of the 26th of September the children of the Faubourg Montmartre were wild with glee; for on the afternoon of that day the favorite and justly celebrated M. Valet was to give the first performance of the season of his famous troupe of trained ponies, goats, dogs, and monkeys.

M. Valet frequented all the fêtes of Paris and its environs with his little company; but in spite of his numerous engagements he found time each year to devote a few days to the children of Montmartre.

In a vacant lot, on which an old house had lately been demolished, he set his tent, gay with flags and streamers, in the rear of which stood the gaudily painted wagons in which he carried his property from place to place.

The first performance had commenced punctually at two o'clock. M. Valet, a large, stout, rosy-cheeked young man, clad in a very tight and dirty green frock coat, and equally tight but perfectly spotless white leathern breeches, and top boots, had made his bow to the crowd of black-eyed, bright-faced children, who, with their mammas and nurses, very nearly tilled the little tent. A few fathers and elder brothers were there prepared to thoroughly enjoy M. Valet's show.

The children laughed, and chattered, and applauded. The ponies had done all their tricks, the goats had been introduced and played their parts with the greatest gravity and decorum; the dogs had danced, and walked upside down and wrong end foremost; had smoked the pipe of peace, and directly afterward killed and buried each other; and then—then came the long expected moment when M. Valet announced the monkeys. What shrill cries of "Mon Dieu! que c'est drôle!" what shouts of delight and clapping of hands, as twelve little monsters in their tawdry finery, securely fastened to the bench on which they sat, glancing sharply from right to left, and anxiously at their master, were carried in by two very dirty-faced young men. What cries of delight when the bench was placed before a table covered with a cloth which might once have been white, and which was evidently the banqueting board.

It must be confessed that the guests did not strictly observe the usual rules of etiquette, but displayed intense delight at the prospect of a feast, mingled with fear lest they might yet be disappointed of it.

They clutched madly at the table cloth, and kicked wildly at the table, upon which as yet no viands had been placed, rattling the chains which bound them, or stopped suddenly to search gravely for one of those minute but active creatures which render their lives a burden to them, but which they never succeed in finding. (If a monkey were to devote the same time and patience to the attainment of any other object, the art of talking for instance, what wonderful results he might obtain.)

After a short delay, the ragged carpet that served as a curtain was once more lifted, and a comical little monkey, a tiny, tiny creature, in the white cap and apron of a cook, appeared, carrying a little basket, which, small as it was, was evidently too large for his slender strength. He stopped occasionally on his passage from the greenroom to the banquet hall, and peering anxiously at his master, whose attention was divided between his very boisterous guests and himself, abstracted from the basket a bit of apple or a nut, and quickly thrust them into his capacious jaws.

This grotesque yet melancholy little object, having at length reached the end of his journey, unwillingly yielded up the precious basket to M. Valet, who, with an impartial hand, distributed its contents and that of a much larger one among his greedy party; when, with a wild shriek of terror, the little cook tore off his cap and apron and flew, rather than ran, over the shoulders and heads of the affrighted audience, and past the astonished young woman who was counting her money at the door. M. Valet followed him as quickly as possible, as did a few of the audience; but nothing was to be seen of the terrified little creature. In a few hasty words M. Valet offered a reward for his recovery and safe return, stationed some idle boys and men to watch the neighborhood where he had disappeared, and returned to finish the performance. In a little

speech to his audience he told them how much he valued this little monkey, whom he had only had some two years, not only on account of his intelligence and droll ways, but because he was the most affectionate, the most loving little creature in the world; and he begged them, if they had any suspicion as to the cause of his terror and flight, to confide it to him. No one had seen anything. One or two persons were entering at the moment, but apart from the slight confusion they made in finding their places, [everyone] was intent upon the monkeys and their dinner. The performance was quickly ended, and M. Valet, whose good nature and unassumed grief won him many sympathizing friends among the children, set forth in search of the lost monkey.

He had not been seen, and not even the flutter of a leaf on the trees had escaped the attention of the gathered multitudes of gamins, idle men, pretty *bonnes* with their little charges, and even one or two fierce-looking gendarmes, who were gazing anxiously at every spot where a fly might have taken shelter.

“He cannot have gone far,” declared M. Valet. “I am sure he is in the ivy that grows on those old houses opposite. He will come to me when he sees me.” And he called, and whistled, and sang those airs with which his *pauvre petit ami* had been most familiar.

Poor little Zizi, meantime, had flown, like one possessed, to the shelter of the ivy which grew so luxuriantly upon the neighboring houses. Once concealed among its clustering branches, he looked for a few moments anxiously and fearfully about him, shivering with cold and terror; then slowly and carefully poked his way upward, until at last in the Mansard roof he found an open window.

Then he stopped, listened, and peeped cautiously in. Not a sound did he hear, not a living creature did he see, but instead a tiny little room, with a range for cooking on one side, in which a fire still smouldered, and a table on which lay a heap of apples and apricots. Zizi loved the warmth of the fire even on this warm September afternoon, and the fruit tempted him so that he almost forgot his strange terror as he gazed upon it. Cautiously he entered the open window and approached the table. To place the apples and apricots in a little heap on the piece of carpet by the fire, and settle himself comfortably to enjoy the feast, was the work of a few moments for M. Zizi. This done, he rested from his labors, and dozed a little, very lightly, however, for at the slightest sound he opened his little black eyes and gazed anxiously around him. Nothing but the closing of a distant door disturbed him, however; and at last, gathering fresh courage, he set forth to explore his new domain. The kitchen did not occupy him long, and he slipped nimbly into the adjoining room. The clean white bed in one corner, and the garments hanging from a row of pegs on the wall, divided his attention, until at last Zizi caught a glimpse of his double in the little mirror that stood on the toilette table.

Hesitating a moment before he joined his new acquaintance, as he supposed this reflection to be, to engage in the search for that bane of his existence, the active and voracious flea, he hopped slowly over to the toilette table. The glass was a cheap little affair standing on the table, and Zizi peered into it and behind it, vainly trying to touch the little animal that so constantly eluded his grasp. At last his curiosity became so much excited that he began the search in earnest, and with his active, nimble fingers was feeling all over and around the little piece of furniture. At the back one of the boards was loose, and though his slender fingers looked too weak to demolish even

this cheap, shabby little article, Zizi's dexterity and adroitness were greater than his weakness, and in a few moments the back of the mirror was stripped off, and Zizi's delight at pulling out the papers that he found neatly folded between the wood and the glass caused him quite to forget the object of his search.

His attention was, however, directed from this charming employment by a sound in the next room, and with one wild shriek, as he recognized the man whose appearance had so terrified him in the tent, Zizi fled by the open window.

The man who had entered the room stood, with the lighted candle in his hand, like one transfixed with astonishment; and then, muttering to himself, proceeded to examine the apartment.

He laughed a little as he found that the little devil, as he called him, had eaten his supper; but his amusement changed to anger when he found the broken mirror and pieces of paper. He examined them all carefully, and then, apparently satisfied with his scrutiny, replaced them in the hiding place from which Zizi had taken them; and with dexterity and quickness almost equal to the monkey's, he mended the broken back.

As dinner time approached M. Valet was left alone, or nearly so; but still he kept his post, and watched and waited, whistling and singing patiently.

As night fell, and the terrified Zizi, once more hidden in the ivy, peered anxiously about him, he heard his master's voice, and in a moment more, cold and trembling, leaped on his shoulder, and, clinging desperately to him, hid himself in the warm, familiar breast. M. Valet held him tightly, and tried to warm and comfort him; but the poor creature shook and shivered in an agony of fear.

"*A la bonheur,*" cries a gendarme, who had been standing on the opposite side of the street. "So you have got the little wretch again. I have been watching that window for the last ten minutes, and saw the little good-for-nothing come flying out, and then peep from the ivy at you. I was just going to tell you to look at him when he began to descend, and I was afraid if I moved or spoke it would frighten the poor beast away again."

"Poor little man, how terrified he is," said M. Valet, opening his coat to stroke Zizi, who still struggled to hide himself. "But what hast thou there, my little good man?" he asked, trying to take from Zizi's hand something which he still clutched tightly.

"It is money. Oh, you little thief!" said the policeman, as they stepped under a gas lamp and examined the crumpled paper.

"It is not a bank note—"

"But a draft—on New Orleans—and to the credit of—of—Jules Alphonse de Joly—de Joly. *Mon Dieu!* It was he who was robbed and so nearly murdered a few days since. *Sapristé!* but you have done well this time, little wretch. Listen, monsieur. He must have entered the apartment of the murderer or of one of his accomplices, and stolen this bit of paper, which shall be the means of discovering the villain. I must make this known at the Prefecture without delay, and yet I dare

not leave the house for fear that the wretch may make his escape in my absence. I hardly know what to do. Ah, there is the concierge of the house at the door. Luckily he is a friend of mine, and an honest man who can be trusted. I will have three words with him, and find out who his lodgers are at this moment. Will you watch the window for a moment, monsieur, and if the light should be extinguished, give me some signal; whistle something—'Ah, c'est toi, Mme. Barras,' for instance?" and before the astonished showman could reply the gendarme had left him, and was seen slowly approaching his friend the concierge, who stood lazily leaning against the door enjoying the fresh evening air.

"*Bon soir, mon ami,*" said the gendarme as he stopped by his friend's side. "How art thou?"

"Very well, I thank you, monsieur, but a little anxious. Indeed, I have something strange to confide to you. An hour ago something extraordinary took place in this house."

"Indeed!" said the gendarme. "Of what nature was the event, pray?"

"Listen, monsieur, and I will tell you. We have a lodger on the fifth floor whom I do not love. He has done nothing that I know of to deserve my hatred, but I confess, nevertheless, that I feel the strongest aversion to him. He is occupied, he tells me, at the Théâtre de la Porte St. Martin; but I do not believe him, and [tomorrow] I shall take steps to ascertain the truth. His movements are very irregular. Sometimes he is away for a week at a time, in the country, he says, and sometimes he does not leave his apartment for days. However, I should not have thought so much of that but for what took place an hour ago. Listen, monsieur, and I will tell you all. I had gone up to the fifth floor to put away some articles belonging to my wife, in a closet that nearly adjoins the apartment of M. Benet, when I heard his step approaching on the stair. I did not care to meet him, so I blew out my light and stood with the door of the closet ajar in my hand until he should have passed, and I could descend unheard. He stopped at his door and pulled from his pocket a little piece of candle which he lighted before he entered the room. He opened the door very softly, and entered, I watching him, when suddenly, monsieur, I heard the most fearful, the most blood-curdling shriek you can imagine. It was not like a woman's voice; and there could have been no woman in the room. The man stood for an instant like one petrified with astonishment. Then, muttering to himself, he proceeded to examine the two rooms. I could watch every movement from where I stood, and, monsieur, he found nothing; there was no one there but himself. But some one had been there, for M. Benet found his mirror broken, and some papers which he had evidently hidden there strewn all over the table and floor; and, monsieur, from where I stood they looked like bank notes. "

"Ah!" said the gendarme. "What did he do with those papers?"

"He replaced them smoothly between the glass and the back of the mirror, which he mended."

"Ah!" repeated the gendarme.

"Does the mirror belong to M. Bénét or to the house?"

"To the house, monsieur. He rents the apartment furnished."

“Good—very good,” said the gendarme. “It is evident our friend has no immediate intention of depriving us of his delightful society.”

“But the scream, monsieur?” demanded the concierge.

“I think your curiosity will be satisfied on that point very soon, my friend, but for the moment I am dumb. In the mean time can you, by any chance, remember upon what occasions M. Bénet has been absent for a night or for a longer time?”

“I cannot remember, but I can show exactly; for I am very systematic, and I keep a little book which will tell you all you wish to know.”

“Good, very good,” repeated the gendarme. “You are a model concierge. Ah, I see,” he added, as he glanced over the book, which his friend quickly placed in his hand. “He arrived on July 14, from sea, you think, from the appearance of his packages, and was away in the country July 27, 28, and 29. He departed again for the country on the afternoon of August 13, and returned on the evening of the 14th. He was absent again the last week in August. Again for a day on September 6 and 7. I think I have seen enough, thank you, my friend, and that we shall be obliged to furnish apartments, at the expense of the government, to M. Bénet;” and raising a little whistle he had to his mouth, he blew softly upon it.

Instantly two figures appeared, approaching slowly from opposite directions.

In a moment more the two newly arrived policemen were left to guard the door and prevent the egress of this one person, while our old acquaintances, the gendarme, M. Valet, and Zizi, hastened to the Prefecture, where the marvelous story was soon told, and M. Bénet’s capture quickly effected.

“Ah,” exclaimed M. Valet, as his eyes rested upon the prisoner’s face, no wonder poor little Zizi was frightened. It was of this villain I bought the poor little beast, all bleeding and wounded from his cruel blows. And—now I remember—it was you who entered my tent just as poor Zizi fled screaming. It was you who terrified him. Ah, you began badly, my friend, in ill-treating a poor, helpless little beast like this, and you have ended badly in killing the poor, helpless sleepers whose goods you stole.”

“That is enough, M. Valet—quite enough,” said the commissaire at last. “We have discovered, thanks to your little friend, this wicked culprit. It now remains for us to search his apartment, and to find if possible the bills and papers he undoubtedly has in his possession. “

“It is not necessary, M. le Préfet. I, villain as I am, believe in God, and He it is who has discovered all this. Two years ago, when I was not as bad as I am now, but bad enough, I was beating poor Zizi by the window. A kind old priest passed by and saw me. ‘Take care, my friend, take care,’ said he. ‘Some time you will wish you had not struck so many blows;’ That time has come. I do wish it with all my heart. The good God knows I wish it. But to save you trouble, monsieur, I will tell you all, only give me time. The papers you will find concealed between the

glass and the wooden hoards at the back of the little mirror that stands on my table. I will answer any questions you may ask, monsieur.”

“*Sapristé!* but this is an extraordinary prisoner we have here,” said the Préfet to the commissaire below his breath.

“It is truly,” replied the commissaire, “but he must be none the less carefully guarded. [Tomorrow] we will know all. That is all for [tonight],” he added, turning to the prisoner. “Remove him”—to the guards.

“One moment, if you please, Monsieur le Préfet,” said Bénét, his face flaming scarlet. “May I see a priest now—[tonight]?”

“*Mon Dieu!* yes,” replied the Prefect in astonishment; and in a moment more the prisoner and his guards had disappeared.

The priest came and went, his grave, sweet face sadder and paler than usual as he passed the guard at the door, and begged that the prisoner might have a cup of cold water taken to him. To the gendarme who carried him the water some minutes after, the prisoner was most grateful. “I will answer all their questions in the morning,” he said as he handed back the cup. “*Bonne nuit, mon ami, bonne nuit.*”

“*Bonne nuit,*” replied the guard, less gruffly than usual.

But the murderer answered no more questions, for when they entered his cell in the morning he was quite dead. “It was not suicide,” said the surgeons who examined him, “but a visitation of God.” He had died from heart disease.

But MM. le Préfet and le Commissaire will never cease to regret that they delayed questioning him until morning.

They will never know now *how* he committed these crimes.

FRANCES T. RICHARDSON.

The Galaxy, July, 1877